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NEWS RELEASE

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Cuba to buy Washington State apples, peas *Nethercutt announces sale valued at more than \$3.5 million*

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Rep. George R. Nethercutt Jr. announced today that Cuba would purchase 1,000 metric tons of apples and 20,000 tons of dry peas from Washington state producers, the first such sale since the imposition of an embargo that has lasted 40 years.

"The Cuban Interest Section today expressed to my office an intent to purchase apples and dry peas from Washington State," Nethercutt said. "This sale gives three million more reasons why we need to improve our commercial relations with Cuba. Our struggling state economy needs new market opportunities, and this sale shows that lifting embargoes can provide a tangible benefit to our agriculture producers."

Nethercutt was the sponsor of the Trade Sanctions Reform Act, signed in to law in October 2000, which lifted unilateral food and medicine sanctions on Cuba, Iran, Libya, North Korea and Sudan. After an extensive consultative process, final regulations permitting sales were approved in July 2001. Initial sales to Cuba occurred in December 2001, with total announced purchases amounting to \$77 million.

"A newspaper story yesterday got it wrong, twice," Nethercutt said. "The Cuban government recognizes the high quality of Washington state produce and is ready to do business with our farmers." Nethercutt made his statement in reference to a *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* article reprinted in yesterday's *Spokesman-Review*, which claimed Cuba was not purchasing from Washington. The article also incorrectly identified Nethercutt's Republican party affiliation.

Consultations on price, quality, and delivery dates with Cuban import agency, Alimport, are underway. Extra fancy red delicious apples are presently priced at 28 cents a pound, so a 1,000 ton sale would be valued at more than \$500,000. Dry peas are priced around 7 cents per pound, and 20,000 metric tons would be worth about \$3 million.

Nethercutt is currently circulating a letter to his colleagues on Capitol Hill to encourage Farm Bill conferees to include language that would give U.S. farmers the opportunity to use traditional financing tools in trade with Cuba.

"These restrictions on private financing should be eliminated to give our farmers a level playing field and full access to this new market," Nethercutt added.

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